

## [Pioneer Railroad Life]

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Beliefs and customs — occupational lore

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Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Pioneer railroad life.

## Library of Congress

Informant: Dan Cummings

Place of origin Portland, Oregon Date 3/30/39

Project worker Manly M. Banister

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date March 30, 1939

Address 2071 S.W. Park Ave., Portland

Subject Pioneer Railroad Life

Name and address of informant Mr. Dan Cummings

2821 S.E. Franklin Ave., Portland

Date and time of interview March 29, 1939

Place of interview 2821 S.E. Franklin Ave.

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Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Jo Brough, Treves Hotel

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. The house is a modest little cottage in the district a few blocks from Commerce High School. It is well furnished although nothing swanky; the home of an average workingman who has managed to make his money go some distance.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date March 30, 1939

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Subject Pioneer Railroad Life

Name and address of informant Mr. Dan Cummings

2821 S. E. Franklin Ave., Portland

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

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1. Ancestry
  2. Place and date of birth
  3. Family
  4. Places lived in, with dates
  5. Education, with dates
  6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
  7. Skills and interests
  8. Community and religious activities
  9. Description of informant
  10. Other points gained in interview
1. Of Irish and Scotch descent.
  2. Born June 20, 1872; Fall River, Massachusetts.
  3. Has wife, a son and a daughter living. One daughter dead.
  4. Has lived in Oregon past 50 years; mainly in and about Portland.
  5. Very little education. Went to work very young.
  6. Did a little logging, but has mainly been a railroad man all his life.
  7. Been too busy railroading to have interest in anything else.

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9. A tall, sparse man, dry in appearance and speech. Palpably uneducated. but willing to cooperate.

10. Member of Brotherhood of Railroad Trainsmen since 1898. Leans toward the Presbyterian church.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Manly M. Banister Date Mar. 30, 1939

Address 2071 S. W. Park Avenue, Portland

Subject Pioneer Railroad Life

Name and address of informant Mr. Dan Cummings

2821 S. E. Franklin Ave., Portland

Text: I went to work for the Northwestern Construction Co., when they started building a railroad in 1896. A. B. Hammond was the main guy. Before that, the only means of transportation was by steamboat. Logging was the only thing going on down along the coast, and they built the railroad from Astoria to Goble to join with the Northern Pacific. They certainly done a great passenger business. I can remember that for twenty-six months the fare was 25¢ from Portland to Astoria. They were competing with the boats. Boatfare was fifty cents, but they threw in a dinner. The fare between points was \$2.00,

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but it wasn't much of a trick at 'tween points to get hold of a through ticket and ride for twenty-five cents.

That was in 1902 or 3, and I was brakeman at the time.

Before this road was built there was a railroad across Young's Bay, running to Seaside. There was no Young's Bay Bridge at that time. They had an old fashioned wood-burner—that was the only fuel then, and a man named Stoner was part owner. "When the road from Goble to Astoria was built, the two merged, and he was made an engineer on the line.

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Then they built the branch road at Young's Bay and through transportation was established from Portland to Seaside.

I remember a bad wreck we had below Linnton. Train 54 left Portland loaded with stock and I was braking on the passenger train from Astoria. The stock train overlooked its hand and we had a meet near Holbrook. Some of the stock and several of the passengers were killed, but I was way down near the end and I didn't know what was going on up by the engines. I flagged all that night until the wrecker came from Tacoma in the morning. A big nigger came along and his eyes were rolling in his head.

"Man!" he said, "De people's all dead, de cattle's all dead...dey's dead ones piled all over like sticks of cordwood."

Well, it wasn't quite that bad, but it was a bad one, all right. Then we had another wreck down at a place called Bugaby Hole, near Westport. It was a stormy night and the rain was coming down in sheets. The hillside was loosened with the soaking it got and down it came in a big slide, pushing the engine and the lead cars into the river. The engineer was killed, but the fireman floated out on the wood and so he was saved.

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The railroad company had a contract to haul stone from this same place. The chief engineer dug a hole in the rock back under the mountain and planted about a carload of dynamite. Then he moved all his equipment to a place of safety and touched her off. When this thing went up it took them three or four weeks to dig it out, because the whole mountain came down and slid into the bay. The people across the bay were nearly drowned in the great tidal wave that rushed out. They couldn't even get in there with cars and had to take the stone out on boats.

I was very good on logs in those days. I had been a logger and I was quite nimble of foot. There happened to be a regatta at Astoria, with a fifty 3 dollar prize posted for the winner of a log-rolling contest. One of the guys was from Michigan and he boasted to be pretty good; in foot, he said he was the best log-roller in the west. Well, when it came time for the match the other guy didn't show up. The officials were worried as the devil, then some one told them I was good on logs and I'd be in on the two-thirty train. They were all there along with the sheriff to meet me when the train came in and they put up the proposition. There wasn't anybody else wanted to take on this fellow from Michigan. I didn't have any caulks and I wasn't particularly keen about it and I said so. But they wouldn't hear of my refusing. They got a pair of boots from somebody at the sawmill and gave them to me. Half the caulks were missing, and besides they were worn out and hardly any good at all.

It was a light cedar log we were to roll, and I got-out there with my heart in my mouth. I had never rolled with anybody like that fellow. But he was too confidant, because it wasn't long before he missed his footing and in he went. Well, the contest was two duckings out of three, so he climbed back on and we went at it again. I knew I could win easy this time because he was wet and I was dry. He couldn't move as nimbly as I could. In he went again, and I collected my fifty dollars. All the fellows from the railroad stood by on the tops of box cars and watched, and they sure cheered me.

A fellow brakeman slapped me on the shoulder and said:

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"I guess you showed him who was the best roller!"

"Hell," I said. "Best roller nothing. I had to win that contest."

"Had to win?" said this fellow.

"Sure," I said. "You see, I can't swim and I might have drowned."

I remember the time too we came into Portland with a bunch of loggers in the smoker. I had a devil of a time with them because they were all drunk, 4 so I locked them into the smoker and let them fight. Would you believe it, when we got into Portland, there wasn't a window in that car. It was things like that we had to contend with.

When I stayed in Portland, I stayed at the American Hotel down near the depot. There is a mark on its wall to this day showing the height of water in the flood of '94. I remember how the loggers used to come to town and get drunk and roar around. Then they'd push the poor Chinamen out into the flood waters, and you'd see them out there with their cues floating out in the water, trying to swim or splash their way out.

It was always things like that we had to contend with. Times were wild in those days.

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Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES



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Comment:

Mr. Cummings is a willing enough talker, but he says his memories came to him slowly. It might be advisable at some future time to interview him again, but he discouraged the idea of returning at once. He could tell a lot about the early railroading once he got his mind to working.